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## Nutrition: A League Project

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# Nutrition: A League Project

BY FREDERICK T. MERRILL

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THE MUNICH agreement, temporarily at least, ended the hope that political questions can be solved within the framework of the League of Nations. Since the Manchurian incident of 1931, the League has become increasingly ineffectual in the settlement of crucial political issues, and in the Czechoslovak crisis it proved powerless to accomplish its primary function—the prevention of war. The inability or disinclination of League states to collaborate politically has been disheartening to advocates of collective security. This failure, and the subsequent return to power politics, have been associated in many minds with a collapse of the whole League system.

The League's successes are not as spectacular as its failures; but, at a time when international political collaboration is in eclipse, the League's successful technical work is assuming new importance and strengthening its position as an indispensable center for international technical cooperation. The agreements in the economic and financial fields, moreover, are continually removing many basic causes of war. The future of this valuable work, however, is now jeopardized by the ever-present political pressure, which influence even the technical committees of the League.<sup>1</sup>

## NUTRITION AND THE LEAGUE

The sum total of the League's social and humanitarian achievements is undoubtedly the greatest collective contribution that nations have ever made to human welfare. One of its most substantial and constructive accomplishments in recent years—and one which particularly affects human welfare—is the inquiry into the problem of nutrition. The rôle that food has played during the last hundred years has often escaped recognition. Europe's enormous increase in population during the Industrial Revo-

lution of the nineteenth century was due in part to the opportunity for better nutrition. Death rates decreased, a remarkable extension in the average span of life took place, and even the stature of the people as a whole increased several inches.<sup>2</sup> The application of science to agriculture greatly enlarged the production of foodstuffs. The technical advance in transportation and economic development in general was translated into higher incomes, which enabled people to purchase the products of agriculture in greater abundance and variety. Famine and hunger began to disappear. This increased consumption of food laid the basis for better health, physique and resistance to illness, and was later aided by improvements in medical science and sanitation. As the food problem changed from that of quantity to one of dietary habits, the science of nutrition advanced rapidly. New discoveries explained the vital relation between food and health.<sup>3</sup> Dietetic errors were found to be the cause of certain diseases, while the deficient nourishment of children, before and after birth, was generally recognized as increasing the susceptibility to sickness and as the origin of organic and structural defects. Later, when the function of vitamins, carbohydrates, minerals and proteins in the diet was better understood, a gradual trend towards better food habits in certain countries became discernible.

Recent League of Nations investigations, however, indicate that the physical condition of a large proportion of the world's people is below an acceptable standard because of malnutrition. In many countries large masses of the population lack sufficient food, in some instances to the point of semi-starvation. In China and India practically the en-

1. Post-Munich political readjustments within the League Secretariat have recently led to the dismissal of the chiefs of the Health and Opium Sections. Cf. *New York Times*, January 11, 1939.

2. In Sweden and Denmark average stature increased 3 inches between 1840-1936; in Norway, 4 inches (1850-1900); in the Netherlands, 5 inches (1850-1907). C. Wrocynski, "Physique and Health," League of Nations, *Bulletin of the Health Organization*, Vol. VI, No. 3, 1937.

3. The World War offered a striking example of this balance, for the death rate rose and fell in direct relation to nutrition conditions, rising markedly in those countries which suffered food shortages and enforced food restrictions.

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ture population is undernourished. And yet many regions have such an overproduction of foodstuffs that producers are faced with ruin. Because farmers are unable to sell their produce in world markets at profitable prices, they have less income for buying manufactured goods. This, in turn, tends to lower the purchasing power of industrial workers who, consequently, have less to spend for the farmer's foodstuffs. Such a condition leads to malnutrition, even in countries where food is abundant.

The original impetus for the League's campaign against malnutrition was supplied mostly by economists and agriculturists. The economic nationalism of the last decade caused an increased domestic production of cereals, which piled up huge wheat surpluses in the exporting countries. More recently, food imports were discouraged in order to conserve shrinking foreign exchange balances for the importation of war materials. These agricultural policies brought about a partial displacement of dairy, livestock and horticultural products, which are necessary to optimum health but not indispensable in time of war. Various economic conferences explored this situation, but more from the point of view of trade than health. The London Conference of 1933 sponsored an International Wheat Agreement with a view to curtailing production through legislative action by means of export quotas and acreage reduction. With the breakdown of the wheat agreement, due largely to the inability or unwillingness of the producers to curb their output, the attack was shifted to the consumption end. The natural alliance between agriculture and public health was then suggested, and the aid of the League's Health Organization was subsequently enlisted.<sup>4</sup> The nutritive needs of populations now became a factor in the search for a solution of chronic agricultural surpluses.

When the League Sixteenth Assembly met in September 1935, general unrest made social legislation increasingly necessary. Conservative as well as liberal governments were attempting by direct means to provide better living conditions and social security for their peoples. The Australian delegation led the discussion in the Assembly. The Second Committee<sup>5-6</sup> pointed out that, because of the relationship between a deficiency of food and social unrest, national governments should take a political interest in promoting health through normal nutritional requirements. To standardize these

food requirements for different categories of the populations under normal conditions, the Assembly adopted the Second Committee's resolution to invite the technical assistance of the Health Organization. Other sections of the resolution provided for the establishment of a Mixed Committee on Nutrition, whose membership was to include agricultural, economic and health experts. The International Labor Office and the International Institute of Agriculture were also invited to work in close collaboration.<sup>7</sup>

The Mixed Committee, composed of twenty-one members<sup>8</sup> under the chairmanship of Viscount Astor, issued its four-volume Interim Report in 1936 and its final report in September 1937.<sup>9</sup> Its inquiries covered every phase of nutrition in its relation to agriculture, economics and health, including the findings of the Health Organization concerning the physiological bases of nutrition and the statistics of the International Institute of Agriculture on food production, consumption and prices.

#### NUTRITION AND HEALTH

Although the Mixed Committee's report tends to exaggerate the results of an improved nutrition on the physical growth of the individual and the political outlook of populations, it is generally admitted that health conditions would be improved by raising resistance to sickness and eliminating deficiency diseases. Moreover, optimum nutrition, which goes beyond the minimum or barely adequate diet, has many advocates who believe that increased vitality and health resulting from the best possible diet, would facilitate great gains in the prevention of all diseases and sickness.<sup>10</sup>

The Technical Commission of the Health Committee was charged with defining the nutritive needs of a human being in the course of his development from conception to adult age. On the one

4. Cf. E. Burnet and Dr. Aykroyd, "Nutrition and Public Health," *Quarterly Bulletin of the Health Organization*, June 1935.

5-6. The Second Committee of the Assembly reviews the work of the technical organizations and submits resolutions on these subjects to the plenary Assembly for adoption.

7. League of Nations, *Official Journal*, 1935, p. 1208. 89th Session of Council. Adoption of Assembly's resolution by Council, 89th Session, 4th meeting, September 28, 1935.

8. Great Britain, France, the United States, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Chile, the Argentine and Australia. Four members represented the International Labor Office and the International Institute of Agriculture. The Child Welfare Committee also had a delegate.

9. *Interim Report of the Mixed Committee on the Problem of Nutrition*, Vol. I, Ser. League of Nations, P. 1936, II.B.3. *Report on the Physiological Bases of Nutrition*, Vol. II, Ser. League of Nations P. 1936, II.B.4. *Nutrition in Various Countries*, Vol. III, Ser. League of Nations P. 1936, II.B.5. *Statistics of Food Production, Consumption and Prices*, Vol. IV, Ser. League of Nations P. 1936, II.B.6.

10. *Report of the Mixed Committee*, cited, p. 83.

hand, the Commission's report<sup>11</sup> set the physiological basis of a rational diet, which includes the minimum amounts of the mineral salts and vitamins necessary for normal growth. On the other hand, it described the special dietary needs in terms of foods for different classes and age groups, especially stressing the requirements of pregnant women, infants and growing children.<sup>12</sup> In evaluating various foodstuffs for inclusion in well-balanced diets, it was found convenient to classify them as either energy or protective foods. The energy or fuel needs of the body are supplied in the main by carbohydrates, fats and proteins, most easily obtained from cereals, sugar and vegetable oils. These foods are non-protective, but important from a calorie point of view. The protective element—minerals and vitamins—and the functional element which is most important for body-building protein are contained in the so-called protective foods.<sup>13</sup> Most important of these is milk, the nearest approach to the perfect and complete food. Other dairy products, eggs, "fat" fish, fresh green vegetables and fresh fruits contain the vitamins which prevent such deficiency diseases as beri-beri, pellagra and rickets, and the minerals necessary for teeth and bone structure and to offset anemia and goiter.<sup>14</sup> In addition, 50 per cent of the protein in a diet should be of animal origin—milk, eggs and glandular animal tissue—rather than plant origin. An individual starves when he lacks sufficient calories, but deficiency diseases can develop through lack of the protective foods irrespective of the quantity of calorie consumption.

It is inability to obtain these protective foods or ignorance of their vital importance which is at present causing widespread malnutrition. Aside from the fact that millions in China, India, Russia and parts of Europe are starving to death for lack of any food at all, malnutrition conditions are frequent in areas where food is plentiful but not diversified. When energy foods are combined with the protective foods in accordance with the varying conditions of agriculture and climate, both the requisite energy for the body's activity and the protective elements against sickness and disease are present.

11. *Report of the Technical Commission in the Physiological Basis of Nutrition*, cited.

12. *New Technical Efforts Towards a Better Nutrition*, League of Nations Questions, No. 7, Information Section, Geneva, 1938.

13. This term was first used by Professor E. V. McCollum, School of Hygiene and Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

14. Biochemists state that 37 simple chemical substances are essential elements of an adequate diet.

#### AGRICULTURAL ASPECTS

The nutrition campaign is based on the necessity for increasing agricultural output quantitatively and qualitatively, and organizing the distribution of agricultural products in such a way as to secure a proper diet for the largest number of people.<sup>15</sup> For political reasons, governments are forced to maintain and protect their existing agricultural structures. Movements implying new adaptations consequently meet strong resistance. The Mixed Committee on Nutrition did not intend to revolutionize agriculture, but to effect a gradual shift in the type of food consumption which, in the long run, would immensely benefit all agricultural producers. The Committee, however, found it necessary to reassure agriculturists on this point, particularly the representatives of cereal-exporting countries.

A greatly increased demand for the protective foods, or a government policy of promoting their growth, would diminish cereal production in some countries but create markets for dairying products, eggs, vegetables and fruits within the community. This would stimulate the export trade of meats, sugar and cereals which, in turn, would reestablish the purchasing power of agricultural-exporting countries, thus providing a market for industrial goods. It was also pointed out by the Committee that the first aim of the nutrition campaign would be to eliminate actual hunger and undernourishment, in which energy foods, the basis of all diets, would play a major rôle. As large sections of the population lack sufficient calorie content, their latent demand would more than counterbalance any substitution of protective foods for energy foods among those who are already obtaining an adequate quantitative diet. Mere mention of the Far Eastern countries suggests unlimited demand, should it ever be possible for them to raise their purchasing power. Any world growth of population, moreover, means an absolute increase in world energy requirements, while many cereal products of agriculture would also be needed to feed animals when the human diet is composed of more foods of animal origin.

Can agriculture meet the requirements of an improved nutrition? Although animal husbandry and the production of fruit and vegetables is particularly suitable to the European system of small landed proprietors, any shift in soil cultivation habits is handicapped by peasant conservatism. Even if the farmer could be induced to substitute intensive agriculture for cereal production, he still lacks the

15. *Worker's Nutrition and Social Policy* (Geneva, International Labor Office, 1936), Series B, No. 23.



capital and credit facilities to effect the change. The difficulties of marketing and distributing protective foods, especially of the perishable variety, is an additional hindrance, causing wide price fluctuations and speculation. Climatic and soil conditions sometimes limit animal pasturage or make it impossible to substitute other crops. The protectionist policies of governments, quotas, sanitary restrictions and subsidies all prevent the free interchange of agricultural goods.

With the assistance of governments, however, agriculture can surmount most of these difficulties, which are partly the result of faulty economic policies. Other aids include the great advances in agricultural science, technical organization for marketing and methods of distribution—refrigeration and canning—by which the production of the more protective foods can be made highly profitable to the farmer. The progress in animal crossing and plant hybridizing, the invention of mechanical processes to supplant hand labor (milking machines, egg and fruit graders, etc.), and the application of biology and chemistry have greatly increased the income return of the farmer per unit of land used and capital invested. Protective foods in general yield a higher net income than cereal foods, and because of the diversification involved offer a greater degree of stability.<sup>16</sup>

The direct effect of such a reorientation of agriculture on the nutrition standard, international trade and the prosperity of the farmer would be generally beneficial. Mixed farming prevents soil depletion and can support and employ more labor on the farms. The diet of the farmer's family itself would be vastly improved as it became less dependent on one crop for sustenance and income. The League report states that "there are good reasons for believing that a trend in dietary habits, particularly in the Occident, toward a larger consumption of protective foods would coincide with a parallel evolution of agricultural production which would in all probability benefit the rural populations . . . and contribute to a resumption of normal economic relations between nations."<sup>17</sup>

16. INDICES OF PRICES RECEIVED BY FARMERS IN THE UNITED STATES  
(1929 = 100)

	General index	Fruits	Commercial truck crops (market vegetables)	Dairy products
1930	86	115	94	87
1931	60	70	79	69
1932	45	58	68	53
1933	48	52	70	53

17. *Interim Report of the Mixed Committee on Nutrition*, cited, p. 85.

#### ECONOMIC ASPECTS

The main cause of malnutrition is not the inability of agriculture to produce enough food; it is simply that poverty and the ignorance associated with poverty deny sufficient food to half the population of the world. No one expects agriculturists to produce food without a fair return for labor and capital. Many people in every country, however, do not have the means to buy the food they need, either because food prices are too high or incomes too low—or both. Low incomes are a national concern, and the League could make suggestions on this point but no particular recommendations. It was more specific regarding commercial policies, food prices to consumers, and the distribution of food.

No one country produces enough of all foods to sustain its people on a mixed diet.<sup>18</sup> In order to protect domestic prices, however, tariff walls against the importation of foods have been raised to record heights during the last ten years. Moreover, some nations reduce imports of foodstuffs by quotas, sanitary restrictions<sup>19</sup> and exchange controls, while at the same time encouraging their own agriculture to produce more under unfavorable conditions.

In Europe food production has increased as a result of these protective policies, and the increased output has occurred mostly in the industrial countries, which normally import a large proportion of their food requirements. Since 1929 the quantum food imports into Germany decreased 40 per cent; into Italy, 45 per cent. Because the domestic producers in these countries have been obtaining a price above prevailing world markets, their people have been forced to pay a higher price for foodstuffs. A rise in the price of bread leaves just so much less for expenditure on the supplementary diet—the protective foods. Thus the relative increase in the price of wheat or bread to the consumer is equivalent to a reduction in real income.<sup>20</sup> As the protective foods are relatively costly, diets tend to include only cheap foods. Not only has the international movement of cereals been restricted, but also of fodder crops, cheap supplies of which are needed to make available the products of animal

18. *Interim Report of the Mixed Committee on the Problem of Nutrition*, cited, p. 79. The United States is a possible exception.

19. Even in the United States there is evidence that state authorities hamper the free movement of goods across state lines which might compete with state industry. Milk is subject to inspection; oleomargarine and beer must pay excise taxes; and often citrus fruits are needlessly barred under the guise of protecting a state against plant disease. Cf. J. H. Rogers, "States' Rights to State Autarchy," *Harper's Magazine*, November 1938.

20. *Final Report of Mixed Committee*, cited, p. 218.

husbandry—butter, milk, meats, etc. Commercial policy thus eventually affects the standard of living of the industrial worker.

A second factor in the price of foodstuffs is production control, also deliberately used by governments or organizations of producers to raise prices by restricting output. The United States, The Netherlands and Denmark have found this action necessary because of the large surpluses due to a violent contraction of consumer purchasing power and the loss of export markets. Government price-fixing is a more direct way of attaining a similar end. A minimum price guarantees a certain return to the farmer and a maximum price protects the consumer. The most extreme cases of government intervention occur in Germany and the Soviet Union, where the level of some commodity prices has the effect of directing the choice of what the consumer will eat in accordance with a planned economic program.

A third factor in food prices is distribution cost. Transportation, refrigeration, rent, taxation, retail wages, credit costs and advertising are some of the expenses passed on to the consumer. The number of persons employed in these services has increased considerably, and the relative and absolute costs of distribution have advanced rapidly with higher labor costs. Distribution services are becoming an integral part of food costs and are now often taken for granted. Many of the expenses of delivery, packing, and credit facilities could be eliminated in order to reduce the price of foods for those who are living at subsistence levels. One method, practiced in certain Scandinavian countries, is the cooperative retailing society, which has been most effective in combating the influence of monopolies on retail prices.<sup>21</sup> Another method of reducing prices is found in the existence of large chain stores and supermarkets, where self-service and wholesale prices cut overhead expenses.<sup>22</sup> Many new scientific and mechanical improvements in transportation, handling and refrigeration are also reducing costs.

#### CURRENT TRENDS

In Europe the difficulties involved in obtaining higher nutrition standards have been greatly magnified by armament programs. It is generally recognized that the people of Europe must look forward to a definite lowering of their standard of living for the next few years as the price of feverish war preparations. Qualitative food consumption

has already been restricted by a decrease in real income, caused directly by taxation and diminished profits and indirectly by the higher costs of consumer goods. The concern over domestic wheat crops and the building-up of surplus food reserves are indications that subsistence in wartime rather than optimum health is the first consideration of governments.

Agriculture, an essential wartime industry, is already on a war footing in many countries, and every effort is being made to secure food self-sufficiency, regardless of either sound agricultural economics or nutrition standards.<sup>23</sup> The European "battle of wheat" culminated in 1938 with the largest wheat crop in history,<sup>24</sup> but imports of wheat held level with other years—probably as a consequence of food storage for war.<sup>25</sup> Since the 1938 world wheat crop is 5 to 10 per cent higher than the record year of 1928, huge surpluses will remain in the wheat-exporting countries. In Europe increased wheat production has displaced the normal production of protective foodstuffs.

Germany offers a graphic example of the prevailing trend. One of the principal objectives of its rigid economic system is to make the Reich less dependent on imported food in time of war. Under the Four Year Plan, an expensive land reclamation and fertilization program fell short of providing for the average increase in population.<sup>26</sup> Experts estimate that 45 million hectares—as contrasted with the existing area of 29 million—will be needed to provide the German people with sufficient food.<sup>27</sup> Crops such as wheat and potatoes are subsidized and encouraged at the expense of the protective food crops and the products of animal husbandry. In addition, the bilateral barter trade program is raising the cost of food to German consumers. In order to force the purchase of German export goods in certain countries, the Reich buys agricultural imports at prices above the world market.<sup>28</sup> Although the Four Year Plan is

23. Between 1926-1930 and 1934, the great wheat-exporting countries, which produce by mechanized low-cost methods, reduced acreage 20 per cent, while the industrial importing countries of Europe increased their acreage 10 per cent.

24. Germany, Italy and France harvested 831 million bushels against 731 million in 1937. The total for Europe was 1,765 million bushels. International Institute of Agriculture, *Monthly Crop Report and Agricultural Statistics*, September 1938.

25. Total world export trade in wheat was 535 million bushels, or 25 per cent below pre-war average. Imports into Europe were 405 million bushels in 1938; 438 million bushels in 1937. *Ibid.*

26. The expense was mostly borne by the industries which were forced by the government to provide tools for agriculture and process the product for consumption at unprofitable prices.

27. Cf. Reichs-Kredit-Gesellschaft, *German Economic Situation at the Turn of 1937-38* (Berlin, 1938).

28. *New York Times*, December 1, 1938.

21. Cf. "Cooperatives," Foreign Policy Association, *Headline Books*, No. 8, 1937.

22. Cf. Craig Davidson, "What About Supermarkets," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 17, 1938.

still being aggressively pursued, recent estimates reveal that Germany can provide only 81 per cent of its agricultural needs.<sup>29</sup>

Since domestic production is inadequate, it has been necessary to restrict food consumption and make the eating habits of the people conform with the supply. The process of selective consumption includes such measures as direct rationing, fixing exorbitant prices for eggs, butter and cooking fats, limiting the percentage of wheat flour in bread and the use of various substitute foods. Whale oil replaces imported fats; fish albumen is used for eggs; potato flour is mixed into bread. A vigorous campaign is carried on against waste. Rationed commodities have recently included coffee, as lack of foreign exchange has curtailed sufficient imports. The current evidence points to a chronic food shortage and a deterioration in the quality of food consumed.<sup>30</sup> The bumper cereal crop of 1938, however, has added over 25 million tons to the 3-million-ton reserve carried over from 1937.<sup>31</sup> The present cereal supply of Germany, including Austria, is probably sufficient for less than eighteen months in case of a successful war blockade.<sup>32</sup>

Some non-totalitarian countries—notably Britain—are confronted with similar nutrition problems. Britain's food consumption as a whole has increased since the war.<sup>33</sup> Because England is more dependent on foreign supplies of food than any other country, it must maintain naval supremacy in order to keep the channels of trade open at all times. Only 40 per cent of Britain's food requirements in terms of calories are produced domestically.<sup>34</sup> Cereals and fats are almost entirely imported; 70 per cent of the cheese and sugar; 60 per cent of the fish; 50 per cent of meats and fruits; and 30 per cent of eggs.<sup>35</sup> Recently, however, the British government has attempted to reduce cereal importations by subsidizing domestic wheat production. This wartime measure will displace the production and consumption of the protective foods which, being perishable, can be economically pro-

duced only at home. The Defense Plan Department of the Board of Trade has already made large purchases of wheat, sugar and whale oil for war emergencies and has worked out a system of rigid food control. Heavy taxation, now almost 27 per cent of income, is reducing purchasing power. The poorer classes in England will eventually bear the expense of war preparedness in the form of undernourishment.

Although other Western European countries are less dependent on food importations and have reasonably adequate food supplies, a serious state of malnutrition exists, particularly among the rural populations of Central and Eastern Europe. This is mostly due to the backwardness of the people, poor agricultural conditions, the system of land tenure, and lack of modern agricultural appliances.

In the United States the nutrition level is well above that of most European countries.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, research studies of the Department of Agriculture indicate that one-sixth of the population is spending less than \$100 per head a year for food,<sup>37</sup> and is probably lacking several nutritive factors. In the mill towns of the South, pellagra, a certain indication of malnutrition, is common.<sup>38</sup> Food deficiencies appear in rural as well as urban communities, especially in areas where farmers are dependent on a single crop. In general, three-fourths of the population do not obtain optimum diets,<sup>39</sup> the standard considered necessary for full health and efficiency. Reasons for such a situation, existing in the midst of agricultural surpluses, are more obvious than methods of solving the dilemma.

Until food costs can be reduced or purchasing power of the consumer raised, food consumption of large numbers of people will continue to be restricted. The largest potential food market is among the lower income groups.<sup>40</sup> The "two-price system," the latest scheme of the Department of Agriculture to expand the home market for cotton and food products, would enable these low income groups to purchase, at prices below retail prices, the huge surplus commodities which resulted from the bumper crops of 1938. Should such a domestic subsidy plan hurdle political opposition and the

29. Cf. W. T. Stone, "Economic Consequences of Rearmament," *Foreign Policy Reports*, October 1, 1938, p. 161.

30. *New York Times*, September 18, 1938.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Present annual consumption for all purposes is between 21 and 23 million tons annually. *Ibid.* War, however, doubles the consumption of energy foods.

33. From 1909 to 1934-1935 consumption per head increased 6.6 per cent for meat; 57 per cent for eggs; 70 per cent for butter; declined 3.8 per cent for milk; 7.9 per cent for cereals. Cf. Advisory Committee on Nutrition, *First Report* (London, Ministry of Health, 1937).

34. The output of small gardens is undeterminable, but milk and a few vegetables are the only food products in which England is self-sufficient.

35. Advisory Committee on Nutrition, *First Report*, cited.

36. For figures on per capita consumption, cf. *Statistics of Food Production, Consumption and Prices*, cited.

37. Hazel K. Stiebeling, "Food Consumption of Urban and Village Families at Different Levels of Food Expenditure," *Journal of Home Economics*, January 1937.

38. National Emergency Council, "Report of Economic Conditions of the South," *New York Times*, August 13, 1938.

39. Cf. *Report of the Mixed Committee on Nutrition*, cited, p. 300.

40. Cf. Hazel K. Stiebeling, "A Dietary Goal for Agriculture," *The Agricultural Situation*, Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, December 1, 1937.

technical difficulties inherent in its operation,<sup>41</sup> it might have far-reaching economic implications for the future. The proportion of the income released by lowering prices for certain foods would then be utilized for the purchase of more and better foods and industrial products.

A gradual reorientation of agriculture would offer the ultimate solution. Such a program revolves around creating an increased demand for vegetables, meat, fruits and dairy products. Should this occur, wheat and cotton lands would be shifted to the production of protective foodstuffs without the necessity for government controls or benefits. To attain the standard liberal diet set up by the Bureau of Home Economics,<sup>42</sup> it is estimated that, in addition to this major shift in crops, a "step-up of 25 to 30 per cent in feed grain acreage over present requirements, 35 per cent or more in hay acreage, 100 per cent in fruit and vegetable acreage, and a decrease of 60 per cent in wheat acreage" would occur.<sup>43</sup> As long as the goal is optimum nutrition for all, it is apparent that increased, instead of diminished, agricultural production is needed. Although domestic wheat demands might be less, the total volume of food consumed would be considerably higher. Since the United States is both an industrial and an agricultural exporting country, and produces adequate quantities of everything needed for higher standards of living, its nutrition problem is primarily a domestic concern.

#### CONCLUSION

Aside from the economic aspects of the nutrition campaign, there remains the fundamental responsibility of individual governments to safeguard the health and well-being of their people. Under the League's recommendation, National Nutrition Committees have been set up in many countries for the purpose of advising governments, and educating the people to form correct food habits.<sup>44</sup> Al-

though governments can sometimes intervene to lower food prices, increase production and facilitate distribution, there remains the immense and crucial problem that the majority of the people exist on an inadequate income level. Private charitable agencies are unable to cope with the extensive problem of providing more and better food for such large sections of the population. Social legislation is thus vitally important to human welfare, for unless wage-earners are protected by some machinery for providing minimum and regular wages, unless social insurance, allowances for large families, work relief or doles for the unemployed are included in the policies of governments, malnutrition would be even more prevalent than it is at present.

The representatives of the various National Committees meet annually under the auspices of the League to compare the state of each country's nutrition with the League's standard, to exchange views and chart future courses.<sup>45</sup> The subject of nutrition occupies a prominent place on the agenda of the Rural Hygiene Conferences, which are concerned with the health conditions and standards of living of rural populations all over the world.<sup>46</sup> The Technical Commission of the Health Committee is permanent in character, its subcommittee meeting regularly to correlate physiological research and conduct surveys with a view to calculating in what degree present nutritive habits are falling short of adequate diet. The Commission has recently given special consideration to nutrition in tropical and sub-tropical regions and to the critical situation caused by forced emigration in Europe. These activities are supervised by the newly constituted Seventh Committee of the Assembly.<sup>47</sup>

The League is the sole coordinating agency in human welfare work. It serves as an international clearing house of information. It recommends and stimulates research. Although no conventions or resolutions which might imply international legislation are contemplated, the nature of the nutrition problem lends itself particularly to international consultation and cooperation. Already a great amount of interest in nutrition questions has been aroused in many countries, especially in Europe. It promises to be one of the League's most successful projects in human welfare.

41. An attempt may soon be made in New York City, where for several years depots run by the city have supplied milk for the needy at cheaper prices. Cf. *Washington Star*, November 29, 1938.

42. Cf. Department of Agriculture, "Diets of Families of Wage-Earners and Low-Salaried Clerical Workers in Industrial Communities of Three Regions of the United States, 1934-1936" (Washington, Bureau of Home Economics, 1937).

43. Wheat consumption is a "depression food." Increased purchasing power usually causes a substitution of protective for the cereal foods. Cf. F. F. Elliot, "Consumption Habits and Production Programs" (Washington, Department of Agriculture, 1934).

44. In the United States, under the President's Executive Order of 1935, an Interdepartmental Committee to Coordinate Health and Welfare has been established. Some twenty agencies of the government, which deal with every aspect of the nutrition problem, are represented on a Steering Committee. This committee is the nearest approach to the type suggested by the League.

45. Nineteen countries sent representatives to the meeting in October 1938.

46. A Rural Hygiene Conference will be held in Europe in 1939.

47. The Assembly set up the Seventh Committee in September 1938 for the purpose of facilitating the work of the Second and Fifth Committee. Besides nutrition, the Seventh Committee will deal with opium, social questions, health and miscellaneous questions.